

BRITISH IRIS SOCIETY SPECIES GROUP

CROCUS BULLETIN No. 1, AUTUMN 1975

TURKISH CROCUSES 1975

This year's crocus foray to Turkey began in fine form when Chris Brickell and I found a colony of the new C. antalyensis only a day after arriving in Istanbul. We were travelling together with Professor Baytop from the University, and had the great fortune to be given the use of the Faculty of Pharmacy Landrover and a driver, leaving us free to hunt the plants. This great generosity and friendliness continued throughout our month in Turkey, not only from our colleague and his family but from all the folk we met in our travels.

Our aim was to visit the mountains of western and southern Turkey searching for bulbous plants generally, but in particular Crocus and Colchicum since there are certain problems to be cleared up for the Flora of Turkey accounts and new species have been turning up fairly rapidly in Turkey in recent years. Thus, the 21st of March found us heading from Bursa towards Kutahya through rolling country with scrubby deciduous woods of Fagus orientalis on the lower slopes and pine higher up. C. antalyensis was growing in considerable numbers in rather thick clay soil with a top-dressing of leaf mould, a delightful blue crocus with a yellow throat. Later on we saw nearly white forms of this with a bluish flush on the exterior of the segments. In most of its general characters this species resembles C. flavus, in having a tunic with parallel fibres, a long brown neck which persists at the apex of the corm, several very stiffly erect green leaves and the same flower shape. It does however, differ of course in colour and also in having a style which is dissected into about six threads. Another crocus which grows commonly in this area is a yellow-orange one like C. flavus, and this also has the dissected style, more like C. olivieri. From its cytology and general characters it is obviously very closely related to C. flavus and is to be described later this year as a subspecies. To confuse the issue even more C. olivieri (= C. suterianus) also occurs, often in mixed colonies with C. flavus but we can separate them by the absence of a long neck to the corm in C. olivieri and the fewer broader leaves of the latter. Incidentally, it is impossible to separate C. suterianus and C. olivieri since the range of variation of leaf width is great in Greece and Turkey and whereas a lot of the specimens from Turkey have narrower leaves than the Greek plants there is a large overlap. In one spot near Kutahya there was a real puzzler, with C. chrysanthus, C. flavus and C. olivieri all mixed together and it was only by very close inspection that one could tell that more than one species grow there, so similar were the three in above-ground appearance. However, the very narrow greyish leaves, and of course the annulate corm tunic, gave C. chrysanthus away fairly easily. Most of the C. chrysanthus had black tips at the base of the anthers, but this was by no means a constant feature. These three species were seen fairly often in this north-west part of Turkey and soon became of no great interest, other than to record the locality for distribution patterns.

The next major call was at Murat Dag, a mountain near Gediz and the type locality of C. mouradii. However, this name appears to be a non-starter. The description is very poor and all one can ascertain is that it is a plant somewhat like C. flavus and C. chrysanthus. Since both species were growing there in some quantity it is fairly obvious that C. mouradii must be regarded as a confused name, and probably a synonym of one of these species.

Soon we were heading for the large mountain block, Honaz Dag, above Denizli, which is a rich mountain, fortunately now a nature reserve. The main aim was to find the new C. baytopiorum, a gorgeous clear blue crocus with a reticulate tunic, named after Professor T. Baytop and his wife, Professor A. Baytop. We did find the last few specimens of this in flower, but in addition saw the odd C. fleischeri in full flower. This little flimsy but beautiful crocus is the only species to have a corm tunic consisting of interwoven silky fibres. (The plant known as C. parviflorus is probably a myth!). The C. fleischeri we saw was white with a dark purple-brown tube and a lovely brilliant red style. Unfortunately, the weather was very gloomy and none of the Crocus were open. Other species seen on the mountain were C. cancellatus in leaf, and high up, C. crewei with blackish-violet anthers and white flowers striped brownish-purple on the outside.

After this, we thought, it would be difficult to maintain the standard of crocus-hunting for we had already seen nine species in just over two days, and a great many separate populations of some of these. The road to Mugla, therefore did not yield much, other than more populations of the same species, with C. fleischeri cropping up at almost every stop. However, one in leaf and obviously autumn-flowering, will probably turn out to be C. elwesii for it had the right corm tunic and the many narrow grey leaves so characteristic of the Saffron crocuses. One extremely interesting find near Mugla was a population of yellow C. chrysanthus with blackish anthers, like C. crewei - a very handsome plant, with a bronze suffusion on the outside of the segments. We spent some time around Mugla and the Marmaris peninsula, and did not add much to the Crocus list, but found a host of other exciting bulbs such as Fritillaria sibthorpiana, F. forbesii, Colchicum ? variegatum, Colchicum ? macrophyllum and Galanthus graecus. However, we did find a colony of the white-flowered C. antalyensis mentioned above. Then, as we were leaving the area prior to travelling on into the Lycian Taurus the next day, we came across a bewildering mass of Crocus, all with annulate tunics. There were both blue and white flowered forms with anthers varying in colour from yellow to grey to blackish. In some extremes they looked like C. biflorus and C. weldenii and others were just like C. crewei, but all the intermediates existed as well.

Our journey through the western Taurus as far as Antalya was eventful with several punctures and a dose of the 'flu', all of which made life unpleasant, but this was tempered by the sight of beautiful colonies of C. biflorus in flower and

several other records for C. antalyensis, C. cancellatus and ? C. elwesii. Other plants seen were Cyclamen alpinum, Fritillaria elwesii, Merendera attica, Corydalis sp., Hyacinthella lineata and Daphne sericea.

We made a special effort to visit the mountain called Rahat Dag west of Korkuteli in the Lycian Taurus, since this is the spot where Forbes collected Chionodoxa forbesii during the last century. Unfortunately, although we reached the snow-line we were still too low down for the Chionodoxa which must grow much higher in the alpine pastures in the ancient crater of the mountain. The slopes leading to the crater are terribly over-grazed and barren - no place for a Chionodoxa. Obviously a climb to the summit about two months later when the snow has retreated is necessary to find this endemic species. The climb had its rewards however for we found a tiny pure white crocus which must be a form of C. danfordiae, although this species is probably in turn no more than a small version of C. chrysanthus or C. biflorus. From this trip to Turkey it is obvious that the annulate Crocuses are in a great state of flux and it is impossible to say at this stage what constitutes a distinct species.

The next stage of the journey involved the Cilician Taurus which extend from Antalya right along the south coast to Adana. Various excursions were made into these, starting with the Manavgat to Akseki pass, the home of Iris pamphylica. A farmer from a village along the road knew exactly what we wanted to see and took us straight to this little reticulate Iris which was still in full flower, showing the extraordinary olive, blue and brownish colours which make this such a distinct species. Few crocus were seen at this stage, mainly being repetitions of earlier species, but after turning inland from Aydinlik towards Gulnar we were once more rewarded with a patch of an early crocus which will probably turn out to be C. vitellinus or C. graveolens when it flowers. The greatest excitement however was an autumn flowering species of the sativu group which our colleagues had seen before in flower, and which is obviously C. dispathaceus. It had red wine coloured flowers quite unlike any other Crocus and we wait with great impatience to see if the few corms we found will be of flowering size for this autumn.

After Gulnar on the way to Silifke we found yet another species which is in the process of being described as a new species. It is related to C. reticulatus and has the same general appearance with slender white or lilac flowers strongly veined with purple stripes on the exterior. It differs in its chromosomes, and also has blackish coloured anthers, making it a handsome species when the flowers are opened out flat in the sun. We noted several populations of this, and of C. cancellatus and ?C. graveolens before reaching Silifke.

The autumn flowering C. olbanus was next on the list for investigation and we duly visited the archeological site of Olba near the village of Uzuncaburc, the type locality of this species which was first collected by Siehe. Although it was of course not in flower, we found corms and leaves answering the description and there is no doubt that this is the plant.

From specimens already seen however, it seems probably that Colbanus might be the same as C.elwesii.

Our last excursion inland in the Cilician Taurus was to Arslankoy, a high village in these beautiful mountains where the villagers said there had been 6 metres of snow during the winter! It was ideal for us because the last snow patches were melting in the strong sun, the ideal spot for spring bulbs. Sure enough, it lived up to expectations and we first found C.reticulatus, a tiny reticulate-tunic species with white or lilac flowers strongly feathered with purple on the exterior and with yellow anthers. Soon after this there was C.graveolens in great quantity growing around the edge of fields. It has a really brilliant yellow-orange flower and the style is divided into a mass of slender threads. Although this species usually has a rather unpleasant smell, this particular colony was quite sweetly scented at first but became rather less so after a while when the flowers were pressed and eventually had the usual nasty aroma which reminds me of rather ageing dish-cloths! Other excitements here were Colchicum tauri, a beautiful little species with many pale or pale pink flowers somewhat smaller than the average crocus, and a Juno Iris, probably I.tauri. It had deep blue flowers with a yellow crest and whitish marks surrounding the crest. Although considered to be only a form of I.persica, there are obvious differences and it may be that it is a distinct species.

This final fling in the south of Turkey was we thought probably the highlight of our trip, but there were a lot more surprises to come. For the last week we hired a car in Istanbul and visited various localities in the northwest, but mainly Abant near Bolu and the Bithynian Olympus, Ulu Dag. Just before reaching Abant, a dry rather bare-looking hillside gave us a surprise by yielding Crocus ancyrensis, C.oliveri, and a species not yet described with lovely blue flowers. This is a reticulate species and is not unlike C.sieberi, except that it has flowers of a much more blue shade than lilac and has a lot of almost threadlike leaves quite unlike those of C.sieberi. The next day in damper places near the snow, we found huge colonies of this, and a very blue form of C.biflorus, which looked very similar but this of course had an annulate corm tunic. Other plants seen in this very rich area included C.speciosus (in leaf) Colchicum ? kotschyi, Colchicum szovitsii, Muscari aucheri, Helleborus orientalis, Iris sintenisii, Fritillaria pontica and Galanthus plicatus.

The next visit was to Ulu Dag, a huge mountain block still blanketed with snow on 9th April, but ideal for the crocuses which were flowering in millions in the meadows fed by melting snow water. The most notable was C.gargaricus a small but brilliant orange species which flowers while the leaves are very short, often with their tips only just showing. It is one of the few crocuses which have the power of increasing vegetatively by stolons, and this it does in great abundance, for some meadows were a sheet of almost solid C.gargaricus.

The other species in great quantity was C.aerius, for this is the type locality of the species, and this occurred in a great range of shades of blue, with a few albinos, mainly in clearings in pine woods rather than the open meadows, although sometimes both species grow together. C.aerius is probably just a synonym of C.biflorus for it comes well within the range of that species. The only slight difference that I could find was that the corm tunic tends to split vertically into fibres rather than being distinctly annulate at the base, but even this seemed to be rather variable. Some odd crocuses were seen in one meadow and at first we thought they must be hybrids between C.gargaricus and C.aerius, because they were a curious muddy mixture of yellow and bluish-lilac. However, they are much more likely to be C.aerius - C.chrysanthus hybrids since this also grew nearby in the pine woods and the plants showed no sign of any of the characters of C.gargaricus. Crocus hybrids are extremely rare, and when they do occur they are between species which are very closely related, so a C.aerius - C.gargaricus liaison would be very unlikely anyway.

So, our Crocus-hunt drew to a close, and apart from some C.pulchellus, C.flavus and C.pestalozzae, we found little else. The latter is an interesting little species which grows mixed with C.biflorus, but is distinct. It is about half the size and has white flowers with a black spot right down in the throat where the filaments join the segments. Although in cultivation we have the blue form, in the wild around Istanbul I know of only the white form. On our last morning before catching the plane home we saw Iris rubromarginata which had just finished flowering, but a few days earlier we had noted that it occurs in purple and yellow forms.

Altogether, a very satisfactory foray, and I cannot wait for the next!

BRIAN MATHEW

AUTUMN MEETING

Mr. and Mrs H. Crook have kindly invited members of the Group to visit their most interesting garden, at 14 The Uplands, Harpenden, Herts. on Sunday 12th October 1975. Coffee will be provided between 11.00 -11.30 am free. Bring your own picnic lunch, but coffee, tea or squash will be available at a charge of 15p each. This garden is well worth seeing for its layout, quite apart from the many crocuses which have mostly been collected by Mr. and Mrs Crook on their plant-hunting expeditions.

AUCTION

The Species Group auction will take place on Tuesday 23rd September 1975, at 6.30pm in a room at the R.H.S. Hall, Vincent Square. Please bring any Crocus corms which you can spare (as well as Iris of course!) to help the group funds.

FUNDS

Would any members of the Crocus group who have not already done so, please give (don't waste a stamp!) me their 25p to cover initial costs of postage, duplication, etc. at one of our meetings in the coming season.

PRIMROSE WARBURG

LIST OF CROCUS MEMBERS AT MID-JULY 1975

Hon. Sec. Mrs P. Warburg, South Hayes, Yarnell's Hill, Oxford OX2 9BG
Mr. F.R. Bagnall, 1 Newlands, Naseby, Northants.
Mr. M. Baker, 16 Oliver Grove, South Norwood, London SE25 6EJ
Mr. G.E. Barrett, Branxholm, 16 Hamesmoor Way, Mytchett, Camberley, Surrey
Mr. R.F. Bills, Elgwin Garden Nurseries, Weston Road, Bretforton, Evesham, Worcs.
Mrs M. Bing, 12 Whitelands Rise, Westbury, Wilts.
Mrs A. Blanco-White, 72 South Hill Park, London NW3 25NW
Mrs P.L. Bradfer-Lawrence, The Manor, Burgh-next-Aylsham, Norwich
Miss C. Christie-Miller, Lime Close, Drayton, Abingdon, Berks.
Mr. H. Christiansen, Fabrica de Tintas de Sacavem, Sacavem, Portugal
Mr. & Mrs H. Crook, 14 The Uplands, Harpenden, Herts.
Mr. R. Cobb, 188 Bramcote Lane, Wollaton, Nottingham NG8 2QN
Mr. V. Cross, 547 Southleigh Road, Emsworth, Hants.
Mr. O. Fauser, Bella Vista Crescent, Olinda, Victoria 3788, Australia
Adml. J.P.W. & Mrs Furse, Hegg Hill, Smarden, Ashford, Kent
Mr. R.M. Jones, 14 Lancaster Gate, London W.2
Mr. A. King, 35 Laud's Road, Crick, Northants.
Mr. D.F. Lee, c/o MAFF Plant Path. Lab., Hatching Green, Harpenden, Herts.
Mr. D.A. McMillan-Browse, Oakwood, Kirby Bellars, Melton Mowbray, Leics.
Mr. B. Mathew, c/o Herbarium, R.B.G. Kew, Richmond, Surrey
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Mr. D. Parsons, Baas Manor, Broxbourne, Herts.
Mr. E.W. Petts, 29 Crichton Road, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey
Mrs C.M. Radford, 8 Paulton Drive, Bristol BS7 8JJ
Miss J. Robinson, Chequers, Boxford, Suffolk
Mr. R. Usher, 78 Wilmot Way, Banstead, Surrey
Mr. J. Wilkinson, Southgate, High Street, Ongar, Essex